

[Method for distributed acquisition of data from computer-based network data sources]

Abstract

A method for facilitating efficient automated acquisition of data from computer-based network data sources, such as Internet websites, by means of one or more data aggregation servers and a distributed network of one or more client computers (each operated by and/or on behalf of one or more end users), that does not trigger "trespass on chattels" protection, violate copyright protection of database compilations of non-copyright data or allow data sources to easily detect automated data acquisition. In a specific embodiment, each user runs a Java applet within their Internet browser that frequently polls a server connected to a database storing the user's preferences. Based on the user's preferences and other data stored in the database, the server generates requests (each to be issued by the client machine to a particular website) and tells the user's applet to issue those requests. Response(s) (or a processed version of those responses) returned to the server may be used by the client machine and/or returned to

the server where they may be parsed, stored in the database, made available to the user (and, potentially, other users) and may trigger the server to generate follow-on requests. This method has many potential uses, including, but certainly not limited to, the aggregation of real estate data from numerous websites for homebuyers.